

## FNLRT Progress Report 01.2022

R. Laughton, 20/03/2021

The following report provides an update on activities from 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021 to 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The report is set out in the form of the Fisheries Management Plan 2021-2026.

**Coronavirus:** FNLRT/SISI Staff: We continue to follow Government guidelines regarding Coronavirus. The Trust office has re-opened with RL and/or James Symonds present on most days, although a mix of home working and using the office will continue for the foreseeable future.

### 1. Climate Change

**Glen Mazeran:** Options for re-creating riparian woodland have been developed with Steve Conolly (Cawdor Forestry) and submitted for consideration. Discussions are stalled at the moment while the Estate consider their future management strategy.

**Riparian Woodland Workshop:** Valerie and I were due to attend this workshop in Kingussie, however it was cancelled due to Covid concerns. However, we arrange a ZOOM meeting with Russ which provided an excellent introduction to the subject. Further workshop due in Spring 2022

**The Fishmongers Company-Small Grant:** Applied for £2k to facilitate discussions with upper Findhorn proprietors to determine interest and identify potential areas for riparian woodland. Then develop a bid for larger funds.

### 2. River habitat and Land Use

**Findhorn: A9 Tomatin to Moy:** The A9 in this section crosses three tributaries of the Findhorn the Allt na Frith, Tigh an Alt and the Dalmagarry Burn. Road Order was issued in Feb 2021 and procurement process for contractors started in August 2021. I had a contact from IKM consultants in October and provided a quote for electrofishing/fish transfer. Contractors likely to be appointed in 2022 and there will be a need to establish good contacts with successful contractor when the contract is awarded.

**AOC Archaeological surveys** conducted surveys during February, Sean and Ali met with the team on site during early March. Raeburns are preparing ground-work investigations and information has been sent through for comment.

**Cloddach Bridge:** The bridge has deteriorated further and closed to traffic earlier this year. Discussions with the bridge engineers from Moray Council indicate it is unlikely to be reopened to vehicle traffic but will remain in place for a period for pedestrians and cyclists. The centre channel underneath Cloddach bridge remains in poor condition with a deep undercut at the upstream end and during low flows will affect fish passage. Maintaining contact with Moray Council to try and get this issue improved.

**Clashgour Windfarm:** Public enquiry results still to be published.

**Carn Duhie Windfarm:** plans for development being revised.

**Lethen Wind Farm:** No further correspondence.

Kellas Wind Farm: Scoping report published; comments required by 31<sup>st</sup> March.

**Muckle Burn: Achavraat Farm River works:** SEPA and farmers in discussions to repair river works at Achavraat. Email (24/11/2021) set to SEPA to seek update on progress. Final warning letters were issued by SEPA to the 2 farmers and the contractor in July 2021. Some mitigation work has been carried out and SEPA intending to revisit once some spates/channel forming flows had occurred. Action: Will arrange site visit to see how channel is repairing.

**Muckle Burn Banarach Bridge Area Bank Repair:** Email (24/11/2021) sent to SEPA to seek update on progress. Discussions ongoing between Estate owner and SEPA. Site assessed by SEPA hydrologists in February. Sean and Ali met with them on site.



**Muckle Burn – Fallen Trees:** Local farmer reported two large fallen trees within the burn both causing blockages and the lower one is causing some bank erosion. Sean assessed the two trees, the upper one is impinging on the railway with potential to cause erosion to their embankment, Network Rails track maintenance team were contacted and it will be removing it shortly. The lower one is near Dyke and Sean has made contact to try and alleviate the problem.

**Lossie-Scottish Water:** Repairs to outflow valve on Glenlatterach Dam completed.

**Mosset Burn – Sanquhar Mains Sediment removal:** Over the last 20+ years a significant build-up of sediment has occurred on the Mosset at Sanquhar Mains farm raising the riverbed above the level of the surrounding farmland. The farmer applied and received a CAR licence and removal will begin in August 2021. In-stream works completed in September. Site visit on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022 indicated the channel has settled over the winter a good range of substrate particularly for spawning trout is in place. A good deeper set of pools (1m) for holding larger fish has formed at the lower end of the site. The farmer reports significant improvement in drainage. Further work to improve banks with large wood debris discussed for this summer.

**Lossie – Mayne Farm Sediment Removal:** Removal of sediment completed in September revisit to site planned to see how river is settling into the channel.

**Lhanbryde Burn – Bank Repairs at Lady Margaret Drive:** Small section of collapsed bank which



required repair through the installation of gabions. The section of riverbank was in poor condition and if left would lead to undermining of the adjoining properties garden wall which forms part of the local flood defences. A CAR licence was completed by Moray Council Flood Team and the works are currently underway by Pat Munro contractors. Two site visits have been completed to discuss the works.

*Bank erosion Lhanbryde Burn*

**Lhanbryde Burn – Kirkhill Bridge:** Site visit to view bridge and discuss repairs held with Kim McGowan (Moray Council Bridge Team). Bridge platform is deteriorating through erosion and wear and tear. The abutments are still in good condition so initial plan to remove old platform and replace with a new one. However, furthermore detailed inspections are required. Fish and habitat requirements

discussed, a fish survey of the area was considered desirable, and a quote has been submitted. (£1375.00) to Moray Council. Works are proposed for 2023.



*Abutment construction for the new footbridge at Lossiemouth, old footbridge in the background.*

**Lossiemouth New Footbridge:** Construction of the new footbridge in Lossiemouth began in January. Comment were provided to the developers Beaver Bridges and Sean and Ali have been in touch with the site manager and visited the site. New abutment on the left bank is complete and the in-river pillars are also in place, with work starting on the right bank shortly.

### 3. Biosecurity and INNs

#### **SISI Project:**



Vicky Hilton decided to leave her post as Publicity and Volunteer Officer (VCO) to take up a new role as an Outdoor Access Officer with the Cairngorms National Park from January 2022. Vicky has made an outstanding contribution to the SISI project over the last four years delivering the Volunteer management plan, provide support to our project officers, coordinate the education, training and evaluation programs, collecting data on INNs control and communicating the project through across all

the various social media platforms. Two achievements really stand out, "Alien Detectives" the educational resource is exceptional and has been very well received by schools throughout the project area. She also led on the development of a volunteer database (CERVIS) which was torturous process, but her tenacity brought this home and it is proving its worth in managing volunteers and their data more effectively. We wish Vicky every success in her new role.

After a successful application Jane Hamilton will take up the VCO role from 1st March 2022. Jane was previously involved in the SISI project as a seasonal project officer on the Tay and the Esks and is looking forward to the challenge.

SISI project officer, James Symonds has been preparing for the 2022 season and has issued contractor tender offers. Job adverts for seasonal POs have been posted with the closing date on 21<sup>st</sup> March.

Treatment plans will focus on Nairn, Findhorn (above A96), Muckle, Mosset and Lossie (Dallas to Wester Manbeen). We are developing landowner agreements with Moray Estates and Wester Manbeen contributing funds already for 2022. Further discussions on this approach will be held with landowners throughout 2022.

James has also maintained the mink monitoring raft and trap network with a number of sightings reported and tracks evident on the mink rafts. However, no mink caught so far. As a result, we are expanding monitoring



*SISI team with their award in the RSPB Nature of Scotland Award in the Coasts and Waters Category.*

rafts coverage and trapping so any volunteers to run a raft would be welcome and please report any sightings.

Callum Sinclair (SISI Project Manager) is working on an extension to the project funded through the Nature Restoration Fund and initial feedback is positive for an extension.

Keep up to date on SISI project at [www.invasivespecies.scot](http://www.invasivespecies.scot) and for our biosecurity plan, click [here](#).

#### 4. Fish and Fisheries

**2021 Catches:** Catches for the Findhorn 1193 salmon and grilse and 127 sea trout. Release rates for spring salmon was 100% in keeping with Scottish Government recommendations. Release rates for salmon and grilse was 90% up by 1% on 2020. Sea trout release rates improved from 77% in 2020 to 84% this season. Findhorn data can be downloaded from the web site [here](#).

Additional catch data for of sea trout in Findhorn Bay was also received this year with 50 sea trout caught and 190 finnock, currently no data on release rates available. Anglers reported good numbers of sea trout and finnock within the Bay throughout the season. Catch data was also received for the Muckle Burn for the period 2001 up to 2021. For 2021 two grilse were caught and retained, 13 sea trout caught with 3 retained, and 9 brown trout caught all released.

Lossie catches were 39 salmon and grilse and 105 sea trout. Release rates for salmon and grilse were 100% in keeping with Grade 3 while release rates for sea trout were 53%. Lossie catch data can be downloaded [here](#).

2022 season so far has started well with 11 salmon caught on the Findhorn to date.

#### Juvenile Surveys

**National EF Survey Scotland (NEPS):** Email received from Scottish Government on 10<sup>th</sup> March indicating that the surveys would not be progressing this season due to problems with facilitating and resourcing the program. This was very disappointing news, the Scottish Salmon strategy indicates a clear commitment to the program, and this is yet another interruption, it leaves a considerable shortfall in funding and considerable effort has been made in training the bailiffs to undertake the surveys. Indications are that the surveys will re-commence in 2023 along with a longer-term commitment. A report on the 2021 results will be available in due course.

**Findhorn Survey 2021:** (34 sites) Ali has been trained in scale reading over the winter and has demonstrated an excellent ability for the “art”. All juvenile scales have been read and we should have the data entered into the SFCC database by 25<sup>th</sup> March. Data analysis and a report should be available by the end of April.

**Nairn Survey 2021:** (21 sites) All data has been compiled and a report prepared for the Nairn DSFB.

**2022 Surveys:** Developing plans for a survey of the mainstem of the Findhorn and the Lossie is due for a general survey.

## Smolt Trapping and Tagging

**Findhorn Tagging 2021:** A report on the tagging results from 2021 has just been released by Angus Lothian (AST) and will be circulated to the Board. A summary for the 93 smolts tagged on the Findhorn is reproduced below.

Within the Findhorn, of the 93 smolts released, 84 smolts were detected at the Automated Listening Station (F2), suggesting nine smolts were lost within the first 1.14 km of the river, with only two more smolts lost during the rest of the river stage of the migration. In total, 82 (88.17%) smolts were detected on the last river Automated Listening Station (F5).

Of these 82 smolts entering the estuary at Findhorn Bay, 65 fish were detected exiting the estuary on Automated Listening Station (F7), indicating an overall estuarine survival of 79.27%. The greatest loss of smolts in the estuary occurred over 2.19 km between F6 and F7 where 15 smolts were observed to be lost.

Thirty-four smolts were detected on Spey Bay Array (SBA) in the Moray Firth suggesting a minimum survival through the marine environment of 52.31%. Overall, the minimum observed survival of the 93 fish released into the Findhorn to SBA was 36.56%.

After discussions with AST tagging, it was decided not to continue smolt tagging in the Findhorn. This year's work will concentrate on four rivers looking at specific problems such as hydro dams (Kyle rivers), canals (Ness) and survival-predation issues (Spey-Deveron). An additional comparison of different sized tags and smolt survival will also be underway on the several rivers in conjunction with Marine Science Scotland.

Due to staff shortage on the Spey, I have been contracted to assist with tagging on the river this spring and have completed the refresher training courses on tagging. Contract estimated at £8k.

On the Findhorn we have looked for an alternative smolt trap site along the mainstem over winter but have not found anywhere suitable. So, for 2022 we plan to operate at Red Craig again. Installation will take place in early April and data on all smolts will be collected. Dye marking and release upstream of the trap will be used to estimate trap efficiency.

In addition, we will also be collecting sawbill scats this season to look at sawbill predation and diet. Sean and Ali attended a training course on sample collection in March.

**Protection of Fish Stocks:** Moray Firth sawbill licence application was successful and based on our count data we received a similar quota to previous years: 5 mergansers, 1 goosander, 2 cormorants. My thanks to Roger Knight (Spey) for co-ordinating the application. A further sawbill count was organised by Ali and completed February 2022. Next count April. My thanks to all the estate staff who help with the counts.

Seal control licence was also applied for in February.

**Poaching Control:** Sean and Ali have started regular patrols across the Findhorn and Lossie (under contract to Lossie DSFB). So far no incidents this season.

## 5. Marine and Inshore Environment

Discussions with Alan Wells (FMS) and other river directors around the Moray Firth on inshore fisheries completed. Became members of the Our Seas Coalition. Valerie and I also conducted several searches into Moray Firth fishing activities. Update will be provided to committee meeting.

## 6. Education and Awareness

**Schools Go To Fish:** All schools projects still on hold.

Meeting with Ian Robertson ([SANDS](#)) and neighbouring Trusts on developing a Scotland wide angling structure was held in February. Inner Moray Firth group established to review angling initiatives and requirements in the area and report back to Ian. RL to chair group.

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